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**Presenter: U.S. Army Major General David Rodriguez, Commander,  
Multinational Force Northwest and Task Force Freedom**

**July 01, 2005 9:00 AM EDT**

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**Defense Department Special Briefing on Security Operations in Northwest Iraq**

Defense Department Special Briefing on Security Operations in Northwest Iraq  
VIA Teleconference From Mosul, Iraq.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Well, I appreciate the opportunity to provide an update on the combined efforts of the Iraqi and coalition operations in the Multinational Force Northwest Area of Operations.

Some of you have been here and seen firsthand the great courage of the Iraqi people and the heroic efforts of the soldiers in the 1st 25th Stryker Brigade, the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regimental Headquarters. It is an honor for me to represent all of them to you today.

First, let me say to the families of these soldiers how proud we are of the sacrifices they make every day. We have had 47 soldiers give their lives for this cause since the deployment began. Our heartfelt condolences go out to their families. Their courage and sacrifices will remain etched in all of our hearts forever. To our fellow soldiers wounded in action, we send our best wishes. You and your families remain in our thoughts and prayers.

Our purpose here remains centered on helping the Iraqi people win the struggle for their freedom. In that vein, Iraqi political and military leaders, along with Iraqi soldiers, police and citizens, are making steady progress against the insurgency. They are also making progress in developing capable Iraqi army and police forces and creating effective provincial governments.

Some of the recent steps the people in northern Iraq have taken include: Units of the Iraqi 2nd and 3rd Infantry Divisions are now conducting combined counterinsurgency operations with Multinational Forces Northwest forces every day. More importantly, Iraqi soldiers are increasingly seen by their citizens as a source of pride and confidence. That pride and confidence has also increased significantly the amount of information provided by Iraqi citizens since the January time frame.

The 3rd Brigade of the 1st Iraqi Intervention Force from the 1st Iraqi Division has been responsible for security in the heart of downtown Mosul since early March, and continues to do an excellent job. The Mosul police are on the streets of the city actively enforcing the rule of law and increasing the confidence of the Iraqi public. On any given day, about 800 are in training, and each month about 400 complete the eight-week basic course for Iraqi police.

Most importantly, they are defiantly standing up to the terrorists. Three attacks this past weekend targeted the police specifically but did not deter them from their mission. They stood their ground, refused to abandon the police station that was damaged by a suicide car bomb, and increased patrols and checkpoints throughout the city to deter further attacks.

The recently elected Nineveh provincial government is undertaking reconstruction planning and developing programs for economic growth. The government holds regional security meetings throughout the province, which are attended by progressively larger members of the community leadership. The regional Sunni leaders and population are increasingly involved in a political transition that will determine the future of Iraq, and the local leadership of the Iraqi Islamic Party is actively engaged with the provincial government.

While the recent progress is encouraging, more work is required to enhance Iraq's durability against threats to their emerging democracy. Iraqi leaders and coalition forces are working in partnership to achieve that end.

I would be happy to take any questions you have.

Q

General, Charlie Aldinger with Reuters. I wanted to ask you something about a Reuters cameraman from Tall Afar, Tall Afar, I believe it is, who was arrested about a month ago and hasn't been heard from since. And the Reuters bureau in Baghdad says that apparently the PR people and the MPs appear to be stonewalling on it. Have you got anything on it? His name is Samar (sp) Mohammed Noor, N- o-o-r. Do you know anything about it, sir?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: I do not know about that specific incident in Tall Afar. I do know that approximately six to eight weeks ago, a stringer for a news show, I believe it was Reuters, was arrested up here and detained, and we have processed him through the detention process with alleged action -- or activity that was not in accordance with the rule of law. And whenever they leave or are detained by U.S. forces and moved down to Abu Ghraib, which was the case of this individual from --- like I said, it was about six or seven weeks ago -- he went with a complete evidence packet. And like I said, we had reasonable cause to believe that he was not just a newsman that was taking pictures of the activities in this area. But I don't know -- do not know the specific name you talk about, but that's the closest thing that I know about a photographer taken from this area.

Q

You have any details of that, sir? What -- I mean, what the evidence was; what -- has he been charged with anything, or?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Like I said, when they go down to Abu Ghraib, they go down with an evidence packet, and we don't discuss the specifics of the charges. But I can tell you the evidence was sufficient to have probable cause that he was committing a terrorist act and supporting terrorists.

Q

Thank you.

Q

General, this is Joe Tabet from Al Hurra TV. I have two questions. My first question is, The Washington Post said today insurgents from Europe, Africa, Asia have been undergoing training in Syria with the consent of

the Syrian government. Are these information true?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: We have no proof of any government involvement in any training of foreign fighters at this point.

Q

Okay. My second question: June was one of the deadliest months of combat for U.S. troops since the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Sixty-eight U.S. soldiers were killed, according to the Web site of Iraq Coalition Casualty Count. How could you explain this, and what is your plan to face it?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: The casualty counts are certainly disturbing, but is not a direct indicator of what is going on in the insurgency. The counts in this area, in the Multinational Force Northwest, has not had a significant increase in that month. So I think you have to look at the whole situation and what is going on throughout the country, but at this point, what we're doing is what we've been doing from the very beginning here. We continue to defeat the insurgency throughout the province. We are increasingly coordinating operations and teaming with the Iraqi security forces to continue to build their capacity, and like I said, we have some optimistic outlook that we are watching closely.

Q

John Lumpkin with the Associated Press. Just was wondering if you could characterize the insurgency as a whole in your region -- just what are your primary adversaries? Are they foreigners, are they Iraqis? What are their -- do they seem to have any apparent goals right now? And is their capability and numbers increasing or decreasing, or remaining static?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Well, the same characterization of -- that's been stated several times over the past is the same characterization of what's going on here with the Zarqawi network and his affiliates who are one part of the equation, as well as the former regime elements and the Ba'athists who were followers of course of Saddam. And also there's some Islamic extremists who are participating in the operations, as well as a group that has some roots in the area and a little to the northeast, up -- who are -- many of Kurdish background, called Ansar al-Sunna.

And they have -- the numbers, which are, you know, a hard thing to get a grasp on in specific detail, go up and down, based on the ebb and flow of the insurgency and where it goes as it continues to attempt to strike at the weak points of the coalition and Iraqi forces. Right now, in the last month, we estimate that we have had a slight decrease in the level of the insurgency up in Multinational Forces Northwest.

Q

General, Tom Bowman with The Baltimore Sun. General Abizaid said just last week that they've seen an increase in foreign fighters coming over from Syria. Can you add a little bit to that, percentages or numbers, how many foreign fighters you're seeing, and also what new measures, if any? What are you doing to turn that around?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Okay. I'll give you a yardstick to measure there. Since about November '04, we have had a total of 90 foreign fighters detained. In addition to that number, the majority of the suicide vehicle bombs and the suicide bombers -- we believe there are strong indications that the majority of them are foreign fighters. So looking at that number, we have a little over 150 foreign fighters since November that we have seen in Multinational Forces Northwest.

There are several ongoing operations that are attempting to stem the flow of foreign fighters into our

operational area. We have, in the process of executing an operation called Veterans Forward, where elements of the 3rd Iraqi Army Division as well as the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment have undergone operations, have executed operations out on the western border region that is attempting to stem the flow that comes from the western boundary here in the vicinity of Rabiya and the Sinjar mountains in the western part of the northwest sector here. That has had some impact on the flow, we believe, in that the increased standards that the Iraqi government has enacted out at Rabiya, which is the one official crossing point out there, has decreased by about 45 percent some of the flow of trucks and vehicular traffic that has transited that place. And that has occurred here in the last month.

The second thing is that we have disrupted about 40 or 50 operations of smuggling, which includes smuggling of weapons as well as other smuggling that doesn't necessarily have to do directly with the terrorists, although some of them overlap because of the money-making potential in some of those smuggling operations. So that's what's going on in the western part of the sector up here. We believe that has had an impact on the flow of foreign fighters.

The other thing is we have been able to gather some significant information about how these foreign fighters flow into the country, and we have taken steps and are executing operations throughout the depth of the battle space to decrease that flow.

Q

Along those lines, too, there was an officer with the 3rd ACR quoted on the record saying that his unit doesn't have enough troops to cover their area. Given that and given that you're their commander, have you requested more assistance, more troops or -- from either Iraqis or the United States?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No, I have not. Like I said, we have 40 -- over 40,000 soldiers up here, both U.S. forces and coalition forces, and we are able to execute the mission that we've been assigned. And they're all doing a great job doing that.

Q

General, this is Vince Crawley with the Army Times newspapers. Could you give us -- characterize in numbers or in percentage the Iraqi forces who are capable of conducting combat operations more or less on their own? And also, have you had problems of insurgents infiltrating Iraqi forces or police forces?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: On the forces, I think -- yeah, in the opening statement I described to you one of the Iraqi intervention forces, which is a brigade-level force that right now is conducting operations and secures the center part of Mosul, and they are executing those operations on their own right now and have been since March. So that's a brigade-level organization that is doing a tremendous job right down there in the center of Mosul. We obviously continue to support it with some command and control, some quick reaction forces, some medical evacuation and some intelligence sharing, but that brigade is already conducting operations on its own right now.

We also have several other units that are at a little bit smaller level, at the battalion level, that we believe in the next couple months will hit that standard also; and we will have a couple brigades ready by the referendum in October; and then we have a progressive planning timeline from there forward in how we're going to continue to grow the capacity of that force.

On your other question about infiltration, that's a constant place to watch all the time, and we have had a couple incidents, very small in number, that people have been caught infiltrating the force, and we have detained those soldiers and police. But it's a very, very small number right now.

Q General, Scott Foster with NBC News. Do you have any credible indications that Zarqawi is operating in your area?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No, I do not. Not right now. He is not -- we do not believe he is in our area at this point in time.

Q

General, Al Pessin with Voice of America. We were told this week that there are some talks going on with Sunnis who claim to have some influence over insurgent groups or even to control insurgent groups. Are any of these talks going on in your area? And can you provide us with any details or any update as to what stage you're at in terms of perhaps negotiating at least some reduction in the insurgency?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No, those talks are not occurring at this location, up in this area, or -- and I am not a participant in those talks.

Q

This is Kernan Chaisson with Forecast International. There's a lot of activity and effort going into finding ways to counter improvised explosive devices. How would you characterize the way of triggering right now changes in their tactics and some insight into what can be done to kind of get a handle on this problem?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: It's a multifaceted challenge that we're meeting with a -- multiple different ways. One is the tactics, techniques and procedures for all the soldiers in the convoys and how they operate out there, to include observation and surveillance plans, pattern analysis of where they've been emplacing the IEDs, how they've gone off. And there's a improvised explosive device task force, who helps us with technical solutions, that is also a part. And like you said, it's a combination.

It's also the observation and the Iraqi people who have started to help us combat that problem. And just today, so far, we've had three tips on -- from Iraqis. Two of them were on IEDs, which we were able to destroy prior to them hurting anybody, and one was on a cache.

So it's a combination of all those factors that is involved in defeating the IED threat, as well of course the protection capabilities provided by our vehicles. And we are just under 50 percent of the number that have gone off in the area that we are discovering, and we continue to increase that number and that percentage over time. And this is a main focus of everybody's efforts over here, because that's the number-one killer of our soldiers.

Q

General, Joe Tabet from Al Hurra again. We heard this -- for the past few days two U.S. statements regarding the situation in Iraq. The first one, President Bush said clearly, "We are going to win." And the second one, Secretary Rumsfeld said only the Iraqis can defeat the insurgency. Which statement, do you think, is closer to the reality on the ground?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: The -- you know, to defeat this insurgency, you know, is going to take both the coalition forces and the Iraqi forces. I think the -- you know, the context of how that -- people look at that is, you know, might be a little bit confusing. But we're all -- like I say, we're going to win this fight. We're going to help the Iraqis win the struggle for their freedom. And that's how we're taking this fight to the insurgencies every day, and we're going to continue to do that.

Q

General, Vicky O'Hara, National Public Radio. Have you had -- experienced problems with Iraqi security forces abusing local population? Have you had allegations of that in your area, and if so, what are you doing about it?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Yes, we have had those allegations. And we have -- we're -- first, the thing that we do first is monitor those situations when they detain personnel, and wherever we see a human rights violation and people doing the wrong thing, we intervene immediately to stop the misuse of detainees or prisoners, or anybody that comes in contact with Iraqi security forces. And they continue to improve their standards of conduct and discipline in accordance with the internationally accepted rules of law.

The second thing we're proud to say is that we have a human rights advisor on the provincial council here, who has personally inspected the -- our detention facilities to see how the Iraqi soldiers were treated, and she has begun her inspections of the Iraqi security forces detention facilities. And we are also doing a lot of training with the Iraqi security forces as well as monitoring them very closely. And the Iraqi provincial government is participating in that training classes, so we think we have a pretty good combined effort to help solve that problem.

They have also had several investigations that the Iraqi security forces have taken upon themselves to execute, based on the information that they have, as well as we have, discovered. And they have taken appropriate action to take care of the people who were participating in the improper conduct.

Q

General, a follow-up, if I could. Could you characterize the scale of the problem? When you talk about incidents, what kind of incidents?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: The scale of the problem is -- scale. It's probably less than 5 percent of detainees. And I couldn't give you an exact figure, but it's not a majority of them. And most of it is for physical mistreatment, so either, you know, they've been physically abused, either being too rough, like that, or they have tried to get -- they alleged to have tried to get confessions by physically abusing them. They have not been anything that came close to killing anybody that we have found so far, but there have been allegations of physical abuse. And like I said, it's less than 5 percent. It's probably less than that; I just couldn't tell you an exact figure right now, but it's probably about 40 or so that we've had here in the last six or eight weeks.

STAFF: All right, we have time for one more question. General, I'm going to turn it over to Charlie for that last one.

Q

General, just to kind of wrap this up, can you see us?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: No, I can't see you, Charlie.

Q

I guess it's like old home week. And we decided that you've grown into these briefings so much that we're going to propose to the SecDef and the chairman that you come back maybe next month and become the regular spokesman for the Joint Staff and brief us twice a day, maybe, for the next five years or so. How would you like that?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: I'll pass on that one, Charlie!

(Laughter.)

Q

We kind of figured that!

STAFF: All right, thank you, everybody. And thank you, General Rodriguez. Appreciate it.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you very much.

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